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R.S. Peters's Concept of Education

by

Donna Carol Wilcox

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the development of Richard Stanley Peters's concept of education. It argues that Peters's description of himself as a "brass tacks" philosopher, concerned only with analytical questions, is inaccurate. On the contrary, Peters's arguments reflect a distinctive vision of human nature and society that puts him in the tradition of liberal educational thought. This vision is shown to be the unifying thread that links Peters's earlier and later work.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Richard Stanley Peters, born in 1919, has been one of the major contributors to the study of philosophy of education during this century. His influence has had a large impact on the field of philosophy of education and he has certainly played no small role in encouraging its growth in universities throughout Europe and North America. In fact, Peters actually re-established philosophy of education as a legitimate and respected field of academic enquiry at a time when it had a very marginal status in academe.

Peters received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Birkbeck College in London just before World War II. After serving with ambulance and relief services during the war, he became a schoolmaster at Sidcot School in Somerset. However, he subsequently returned to Birkbeck in 1946 to become a lecturer. In 1962, he took over the Chair of Philosophy of Education at the University of London where he produced a vast volume of influential literature in the field. In 1983, Peters retired from the Chair at the University due to poor health. However, he was honoured as an Emeritus

Professor. Throughout his tenure at the University of London, he also took on professorships of a visiting nature at Harvard University, the Australian National University, the University of Auckland, and the University of British Columbia. His influential contribution to the establishment and development of the philosophy of education was thus made manifest internationally. To this day, his works stand out as a significant presence in the field of philosophy of education, despite the contemporary trend toward Post-modern thought.

Peters put out such a great volume of work that it is noteworthy that he continually modified and refined his ideas until the end of his career. This was sometimes in response to his critics who often misunderstood or needed clarification on some of his ideas. Peters's revision of ideas throughout his career, however, was more likely an attempt to quiet his most severe critic: himself. He referred to himself as follows:

> I feel a very mundane fellow whose eyes are more likely to be fixed on the brass-tacks on or under the teacher's desk than on the Form of the Good.[1]

By describing himself as a "brass-tacks" philosopher, Peters identified himself with the tradition of analytic philosophy that had come to dominate philosophy departments in the English-speaking world by

the middle of the twentieth century. The analytic philosopher eschewed traditional philosophical questions about the essential nature of human beings and the good society, focusing on narrower, more mundane questions about the meaning of concepts and the presuppositions of rational discourse.

In R.K. Elliott's essay, "Richard Peters: A Philosopher in the Older Style", Elliott disputes Peters's non-metaphysical view of himself as a primarily "brass-tacks" philosopher by saying:

> Peters accurately describes attitudes which were prevalent in analytical philosophy at the time he was writing, but it is questionable whether he properly understood his own...I would not say, however, that his chief contribution to Philosophy of Education is to be found either in his treatment of relatively concrete issues or in his use of the analytical method. It is located, rather, in his reflection on the general nature of education and its relation to very general questions concerning 'the human condition', the nature of truth, the meaning of 'God', and the nature of the world.[2]

Whether Peters is truly a "brass-tacks" philosopher or a more general philosopher is open to debate. In this thesis, I examine Peters's more significant works in more or less chronological order and argue that Peters was much more concerned with traditional philosophical questions than he himself might admit. I claim that Peters was definitely much more than simply a "brass-tacks" philosopher.

In Chapter 2, I will address Peters's concept of

education as it was developed in his essay "Education as Initiation" and his book, Ethics and Education. Peters outlines the various criteria which constitute the concept of education. The problems with the various interpretations of education are discussed as well as the social context in which education takes place, including that of social morality. Some scrutiny in this chapter is also given to Peters's initial attempts at an argument for the justification of education. Peters's predominant view of human nature manifests itself in all of his writings and is apparent in his book, Essays on Educators, which is also discussed in this chapter. This book is significant in that it provides the reader with a much clearer insight into Peters's position on the human condition in relation to other philosophers of education. In particular, Peters's close affinity with Plato is examined here.

Chapter 3 looks at Peters's famous essay, "Education and the Educated Man", where he develops a bifurcated concept of education to parry some important objections to his earlier analysis. This chapter also examines Peters's attempt to refine his transcendental justification of education.

Finally, in the concluding Chapter 4, I introduce the reader to Peters's last important essay, "Democratic Values and Educational Aims" which seeks to address earlier criticisms. Here we find that Peters admits that the concept of education is really too contestable to serve by itself as a useful guide to educational practice. This chapter explains why Peters turns to educational aims as the basis for discussion and analysis within a democratic society and drops "education" as a determinate concept altogether.

Peters's preoccupation with proving that education as a concept could be justified perhaps seemed futile in the end. In "Democratic Values and Educational Aims" he tried to put the matter to rest, but could not do so without reasserting his convictions regarding human nature and the good society. These convictions are the thread of continuity that links together the various stages in the development of Peters's thought. In his final essay, "Philosophy of Education", Peters seems somewhat resigned to the criticism that had been directed against his earlier work. But in making suggestions about future directions for the philosophy of education, the themes of human nature and social values are as prominent as ever.

It is my hope that the reader will discover in this thesis the evidence that Peters was a masterful

and reflective thinker and, since he was such a prolific writer, a great contributor to the body of work in the field which he himself re-established.

Footnotes

[1]Richard S. Peters, Education as Initiation: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of London Institute of Education, 9 December 1963, (London: Harrap & Co. for University of London Institute of Education, 1964), p. 8.

[2]R.K. Elliott, "Richard Peters: A Philosopher in the Older Style" in Education, Values and Mind: Essays for R.S. Peters, David E. Cooper, Editor, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 42.

CHAPTER 2

EDUCATION AS INITIATION

A. The Meaning of "Education"

Peters asserts that the concept of education is fairly nebulous and thus, open to misinterpretation. He acknowledges that there are other terms that are also open to misinterpretation or various interpretations such as truth, the good life, etc. Nevertheless, the ambiguities in the term "education" are such that it is difficult to pin it down with a specific definition. In his writings, Peters often put quotation marks around the word, "education", so as to emphasize the elusive quality of the word. In "Education as Initiation", Peters enlightens us as to the nature of the concept of education. Specifically, he claims that it involves four criteria.

The first criterion is that education initiates the learner into what is considered worthwhile. At first glance, it might seem that to merely consider something worthwhile makes an activity eligible for the kind of initiation that education entails. This is where Peters's second criterion of education comes into play. What the learner is initiated into must be genuinely worthwhile, that is, it must be intrinsically valuable. For instance, one might consider playing

bingo or sunning oneself as worthwhile, when in fact, they are relatively worthless enterprises when viewed within some objective understanding of worthwhile pursuits. Although initiation into what is considered worthwhile is a necessary condition for education, it is not sufficient. There are other factors necessary to the mix. We must also keep in mind that to merely consider an activity worthwhile does not always make it so.

The third related criterion necessitates that what is learned includes a considerable body of knowledge and that this knowledge be not narrowly specialized. Indeed, although depth of understanding is encouraged, so too is cognitive breadth. Peters emphasizes the need for pursuing a great breadth of knowledge as well as forms of knowledge that allow one to understand the **why** of things as opposed to merely the **how**. By studying forms of knowledge that show us the **why** of things, we can apply this way of thinking and what has been learned to other areas in our lives. Such content would include disciplines such as science, mathematics, classics, and so on, that have intrinsic value in that they seek to address the permanent questions of truth that apply to the human condition.

The fourth criterion holds that when an individual is initiated into that which is **truly** worthwhile, he or

she must aspire to develop a non-instrumental attitude toward what he or she learns. This non-instrumental attitude is ever-present while the individual attempts to understand that which is worthwhile. If this, along with the other conditions is met, then such a person, Peters indicates, is truly educated.

The above four criteria require that "something valuable must be passed on".[1] This revolves around the individual's commitment to that which is worthwhile and a caring for genuine understanding and truth. By doing so, one develops a non-instrumental attitude towards the intrinsic nature of education. This attitude permeates the development of one's mind and character as well as the training of one's intellect. Generally, in "Education as Initiation", however, Peters states that due to the voluntary nature of the commitment to educational values that befits the educated mind, activities such as conditioning and indoctrination are to be avoided. In Peters's later writings, he insists that it is possible to avoid conditioning and indoctrination, even while initiating younger children into worthwhile subject matter without their immediate willingness or commitment:

> Talk about the 'aims of education' depends to a large extent on a misunderstanding about the sort of concept that 'education' is...To enlarge upon this point which is crucial for my thesis: 'Education' is not a concept that marks out any particular type of process such as training, or

> activity such as lecturing: rather it suggests criteria to which processes such as training must conform. One of these is that something of value should be passed on.[2]

This statement serves to affirm Peters's rather Platonist idea that any one of the four criteria of education really implies an objective standard to which processes and activities must adhere in order to be considered worthwhile. Thus, the activity of education is held up to a standard which imparts to the committed individual content matter that is truly worthwhile.

Initiation into worthwhile activities would be, according to Peters, initiation into activities that are of intrinsic value in that they deal with valuable subject matter and are worthy of being passed on. He appears to favour using the word "initiation" to characterize the process of education because it avoids the implication of extrinsic ends being achieved. Also, it connotes a process which Peters feels is inseparable from education: the individual is inducted into a **social** practice.

The term "moulding" as a model of education is eschewed by Peters because it implies a viewpoint which necessarily obscures the transformation of inner perspective that education properly involves. Peters considers this to be inconsistent with the true educational process.[3] "Moulding", also known as the empiricist/behaviorist outlook or the Lockian "blank

slate," obscures the necessary element of the shift of inner consciousness. Initiation, hence education, cannot properly exist without this element of the shift of inner consciousness being present.

Peters has equal disdain for the Rousseauian "growth" model of education, but for a different reason.[4] The child-centred notion of "growth" is different from "moulding" as it suggests a non-external element in the educational process: the unfolding of some purely inner potential. This child-centred model likens education to an automatic psychological process in which the learner naturally develops or grows towards something that is considered to be desirable. Peters believes that the extrinsic end that the learner is deemed to be naturally inclined to achieve is often an illusory end and that the child is expected to become educated based on a weak psychological theory with a lack of objective standard to determine worthwhile content. Also missing is the all-important aspect of initiation into social practices.

Peters distinguishes his concept of "initiation" from the "moulding" and "growth" models of education throughout his writings. However, he warns that along with initiation can come two prominent dangers through the misunderstanding of what "education" is by teachers. One danger is to assume that education is

merely an instrumental process and the other danger is when teachers try to teach beyond a student's scope or ability in an attempt to equalize everyone ("gentling the masses").[5]

It is difficult to avoid acknowledging the possibility of extrinsic rewards which might be made manifest by following the type of educational pursuits endorsed by Peters. Peters certainly does not deny that there is extrinsic value, but it is often by and large a by-product of a non-instrumental approach to education. In other words, this extrinsic value can come about rather automatically when one pursues education primarily for its own sake and by exposing oneself to subject matter or cognitive content that is worthwhile.

It is clear that Peters's "Education as Initiation" espouses his view that education is intrinsically valuable. Many of us, including teachers, overlook or are unaware of this intrinsic value. Peters attempts to show the reader that by the fostering of a non-instrumental attitude toward education along with the fulfillment of its other three interrelated criteria one can become truly educated. An integral part of this is to view education as initiation into that which is deemed to be worthwhile by virtue of its having been passed on from others who

deem it to be worthwhile. In this way, a non-instrumental attitude can be formed. One then begins to realize more and more that one should become educated for the sake of education itself.

B. Ethics and Education

"Education as Initiation", merely scratches the surface of many of Peters's ideas on education. However, Peters's subsequent book, Ethics and Education takes a deeper and more cogent look at the concept of education.

Peters addresses the concept of education by first distinguishing between what he describes as central and peripheral uses of the term "education". As I noted earlier, Peters describes the word "education" as ambiguous. However, he was able to ascribe criteria to the word. He discusses misuses of the word "education" by refuting various arguments that would reduce the term "education" to an activity, an achievement, or an aim. Rather, he likens the word, "education" to the word, "reform":

> But no specific type of activity is required. A man can do it himself in solitary confinement, or acquire it by constant activity in a small group. He can be trained on his own by a tutor or be inspired by lectures given to 500. In this respect 'education' is rather like 'reform'. It picks out no particular activity or process. Rather it lays down criteria to which activities or processes must conform.[6]

Peters says that "education" and "reform" have normative similarities in that both concepts possess the criterion of attempting something that is worthwhile. However, he then qualifies this by saying that "education" is different from "reform" in that "reform" implies that one must be brought from a "bad" state of being to a "good" state of being. Peters says that "education" is still in a different dimension altogether, despite the similarities with the concept of "reform". One does not necessarily have to be brought from a bad state to a good state for education to take place. Being "bad" is not a necessary state from which education must then spring forth. It is simply not a necessary element in the mix that makes up an educated person. Hence, the subtle difference between reform and education.

To improve our understanding of the term, Peters again draws our attention to the criteria that necessarily accompany the concept of education. In this case he elucidates his third and fourth criteria of education, which refer to the learner acquiring a considerable body of knowledge, while developing a non-instrumental attitude toward what he or she learns. He describes cognitive aspects of education, including knowledge and understanding, which lead to not just "know-how", but to reasons "why". For instance, he

refers to A.N. Whitehead's writings in this area who, like Peters, has argued that knowledge and understanding cannot be inert.[7] They must be a transformative part of the way in which an individual looks at the world. One's knowledge must be more than fragments of information if one is to be educated. One must be able to apply one's knowledge to one's ongoing experience of the world, as well as be inclined to do so. This transformation leads to understanding. If one does have knowledge, but keeps it cut off from the rest of one's life, then one can be said to be knowledgeable, but not educated. Also, one must be able to approach the world from the "inside", so to speak, of the forms of thought that make up one's knowledge. For example, Peters states:

> It must involve the kind of commitment that comes from being on the inside of a form of thought and awareness...In forms of thought where proof is possible cogency, simplicity, and elegance must be felt to matter. And what would historical or philosophical thought amount to if there was no concern about relevance, consistency, or coherence? All forms of thought and awareness have their own internal standards of appraisal. To be on the inside of them is both to understand and to care. Without such commitment they lose their point. I do not think that we would call a person 'educated' whose knowledge was purely external and inert in this way.[8]

Peters then goes on to explain what it means to be educated and not merely knowledgeable. This involves the need for "cognitive perspective". Cognitive perspective requires that one be able to connect one's

knowledge with other aspects of one's life. One can be highly trained in one area and yet not be able to make this connection with other areas of one's life. In this way, we can understand how cognitive perspective can differ from say, being on the inside of only one or two forms of thought. One can be on the inside of one highly specialized discipline (form of thought) and still lack the breadth of understanding that the requisite cognitive perspective entails. This would mean that a highly trained scientist might know only about science, but nothing about other subjects, thus we could not call him educated. We could only call him trained. The educated man is educated because education is of the "whole man" and cannot be reduced to "any specialized skill, activity, or mode of thought."[9]

Peters's emphasis on breadth of understanding and a non-instrumental attitude to knowledge marks some obvious common ground with the advocates of "liberal" education. Peters's discussion of liberal education takes into consideration the idea that the term "liberal" can be misinterpreted, just as the term "education" has been. He discusses various ambiguities in the term, but favours the interpretation of the word "liberal" which relates most to cognitive perspective. That is, liberal education should be liberal in the

sense that to be educated, one ought to be introduced to and immersed into varieties of worthwhile subject matter. A truly liberal education then, would include varied subjects that would allow the individual to avoid becoming specialized in only one subject. By becoming liberally educated one develops and maintains one's "cognitive perspective" and is then able to transform this knowledge to other areas of life.

It is necessary to mention that Peters made a point of distinguishing his idea of liberal education from vocational training. Because there are different ways in which to extend the term "liberal" in "liberal education", it is possible to interpret even vocational studies as being "liberalized". In that event, they would become vocational <u>education</u> rather than training. Peters viewed all education in its true form as being liberal, but thought that some education might combine liberal and vocational purposes. This vocational education would differ from vocational training precisely because of its liberal aspect. He characterizes this as follows:

> For instance, it is often said that vocational training should be 'liberalized'. This could mean firstly that people were taught cooking, carpentry, and home economics in such a way that the intrinsic standards involved in the activities were constantly stressed and not merely the consumer value of the end-product; or it could mean secondly that these practical interests should be used as centres of interest from which people could be encouraged to develop an interest

> in wider areas of knowledge that were relevant to the practice of them...Or it could mean thirdly that the knowledge required for vocational purposes should be transmitted in a less dogmatic way, that trainees should be encouraged to be more critical about what they are taught. All such approaches to vocational training could be attempts to increase its educational value.[10]

Peters also uses such examples to demonstrate that while there may be different interpretations of the word "liberal", it still serves to confirm how the criteria in education remain consistent and constant.

C. The Social Context of Education

In Ethics and Education, Peters offers a cogent interpretation of the **social** dimension of the development of mind. Peters first discusses "consciousness" as the "hallmark of the mind".[11] He believes that often throughout history, consciousness has been mistaken as a product of the individual and there has been, especially as of late, "an undue emphasis on individual experience".[12] Peters believes that although a child might be born with a rudimentary consciousness, the consciousness at this stage is not yet affected by various social phenomena which are also part of the conscious make-up. For instance, Peters states that:

> ...the ideas and expectations of an individual centre of consciousness are the product of the initiation of an individual into public traditions enshrined in the language, concepts, beliefs, and rules of a society...the objects of consciousness

> are first and foremost objects in a public world that are marked out and differentiated by a public language into which the individual is initiated.[13]

Peters's ideas on the connection between education and initiation and public tradition were greatly influenced by his reading of the conservative political and educational theorist, Michael Oakeshott. This is evidenced in a book entitled, Politics and Experience. Essays Presented to Michael Oakeshott, where Peters dedicates a chapter to "Michael Oakeshott's Philosophy of Education". The theme of the chapter is how tradition is being overlooked in the way of "progressive" forms of education:

> There are too many 'progressive' educators and parents who place too little emphasis on the enormous importance of habit and tradition in moral education. Oakeshott's brilliant sketch of traditional morality is a healthy corrective to such rationalistic excesses.[14]

Peters characterizes Oakeshott in a most favourable and flattering manner and is not subtle in stating that he shares his views:

> ...the overall impression of an extremely civilised man writing with acuteness, elegance and conviction about a matter which is of no small account...the passing on of a civilisation.[15]

Peters states that though Oakeshott does not provide any empirical evidence for his general thesis, he postulates that perhaps Oakeshott "like Hobbes, reached it by reading in himself 'not this or that particular man; but mankind"'.[16] Here again, Peters shows a

philosophical preoccupation with the human condition that belies his claim that he is only a brass-tacks philosopher.

Furthermore, Peters, like Oakeshott, believes that although individual consciousness is still very important to acknowledge, one cannot ignore the significant aspects of a society that manifest themselves in that individual's consciousness and help to shape it. These manifestations that help shape the consciousness hail from the social dimension and would include a society's language, concepts, beliefs, and rules. Within this social dimension we find the worthwhile activities within which the individual is initiated in order to become educated. Peters asserts that there must be a reason for these activities to be chosen over others in order for them to be considered worthwhile and worthy of being passed on.[17] What are these activities and how can they be justified?

D. The Justification of Education

In the face of the masses of people who really do not care about education, justification might appear to be a difficult task. Indeed, Peters states that arguing for education is hopeless because enthusiasm for education "is caught rather than engendered".[18] Those who need an extrinsic reason for education can

often acquire this enthusiasm once they are inside the process. Only then might they begin to understand education's intrinsic value and realize the need for a non-instrumental attitude. Nevertheless, there is, as Peters says, "the problem of the majority who do not care".[19] This majority might never become educated:

> The majority of men are geared to consumption and see the value of anything in terms of immediate pleasure or as related instrumentally to the satisfaction of their wants as consumers. When they ask the question 'What is there in this for me?' or 'Where will this get me?' activities like science or arts have no straightforward appeal. For they offer sweat and struggles rather than immediate delight and their instrumentality to the satisfaction of other wants is difficult to discern.[20]

Thus we see the difficulty of justification for the masses. Nevertheless, in order for curricula at schools and institutions to be planned, we still need justification for the questions, "Why do this rather than that?" and "Why should these activities be considered worthwhile?". Why, indeed, should we choose to delve into subjects such as science, art, literature, and history rather than golf, bridge, or bingo? The answer lies in the nature of the activities themselves. Which activities offer us a level of cognitive concern and a theoretical or objective standard that might transform other areas of our lives and which do not? Peters acknowledges that although this cognitive perspective argument for justification

is important, it is predominantly instrumental in nature. Peters then points out a non-instrumental justification for questions about worthwhile activities or "why do this rather than that" types of questions.

Justification of education for non-instrumental reasons arises out of the question, "why do this rather than that"? Peters says that anyone who would ask this question must already have committed himself or herself to a serious level of inquiry and pursuit of truth and thus, already has the non-instrumental attitude necessary for justification. To **ask** for justification, is already to presuppose the value of justification.

Peters probes this issue in more depth in his chapter on "Classical Theories of Justification", in particular, the fifth section entitled, "Towards a Positive Theory of Justification". Here he examines the public sphere in which justification must be viewed and the presuppositions that individuals must have in order to take part in public discourse. These presuppositions take the form of abstract principles. Peters says that classical theories of justification have ignored this public realm where presuppositions of principles exist. By ignoring the public realm, such theories stress presuppositions by individuals only, and therefore are of little use in developing general theory. For example, Peters states:

> It is always possible to produce ad hominem arguments pointing out what any individual must actually presuppose in saying what he actually says. But these are bound to be very contingent, depending upon private idiosyncrasies, and would obviously be of little use in developing a general ethical theory. Of far more importance are arguments pointing to what any individual must presuppose in so far as he uses a public form of discourse in seriously discussing with others or with himself what he ought to do.[21]

In other words, the very asking of the questions, "why do this rather than that?" or "what ought I to do?" implies the need for a general theory that would identify the abstract moral principles presupposed by rational discourse about how we ought to live. Since rational discussion of education must proceed within that context, we need to look at how Peters understands the moral principles that apply to the process of education.

E. Social Morality, Education, and Human Nature

Peters argues that there must be a presumption in favour of freedom as long as there is no harm done to others. The concept of freedom in relation to education, according to Peters, applies to society in the same way as it applies to education. In his justification of the principle of liberty, he raises some interesting qualifications about certain ideas of freedom and he maintains that true freedom will necessarily have some constraints because liberty

without responsibility results merely in anarchy and chaos. He calls this the "paradox" of freedom.

Since Peters argues that there must be a presumption in favour of freedom as long as there is no harm done to others, there is a need for reasonable constraints both in society and in the classroom:

> Without minimum conditions of order a classroom would degenerate into a Tower of Babel, and the freedom of some would be exercised at the expense of others...From the point of view of freedom it is a better bet for the individual to accept a system of levelling constraints which limit his freedom of action but limit also the freedom of action of others to interfere with him, than to commit himself to a state of nature in which he runs the risk of being arbitrarily coerced or subjected to merciless group pressure.[22]

Peters suggests that in the classroom as in society, in order for true freedom to be exercised, we must follow a middle course between authoritarianism and permissiveness. If freedom is allowed to run awry with no constraints, then human nature will impose its own arbitrary rules, often with the powerful making rules to the disadvantage of the weak.

What then is the nature of authority in society and hence in the classroom? Peters cautions that authority is often mistaken for power, but that true authority has a level of responsibility and selflessness that the concept of power does not entail. If authority is abused, then power with no sense of responsibility has taken its place. Power implies that

the negative element of coercion may be present. As a responsible government must learn to be in authority without being authoritarian, so must "teachers and parents...learn to be in authority without being authoritarian".[23]

Insofar as there are varying interpretations of the concepts of education, authority, and freedom, so too are the interpretations of the word "democracy" multifarious. Thus, Peters states that:

> It is necessary also to consider carefully both the meaning and the justification of democracy in general, before considering its possible applications to education.[24]

What democracy truly is and stands for seems to be becoming more and more complicated in a pluralistic society where divergent opinion is the norm. Few argue with the notion, however, that education should be democratic. But what is democratic? Peters says that in order for a democracy to work, we must all generally be in consensus about what a democracy's general principles comprise. He provides us with a view as to what those fundamental principles are and states that if democracy is to exist, we must at least follow these principles. This then would uphold the standard to which democracy must adhere in order for democracy to exist. The lesser order principles would be handled, in turn, so long as the minimal principles of democracy were in place and followed strictly.

What are these minimal principles? Peters gives us a good idea of them in the following statement:

> But it is precisely because there is agreement about the procedural principles of fairness, tolerance and the consideration of interests, which provide a framework for such issues to be discussed, that we can afford to differ about lower-level matters where fundamental principles conflict. Such a consensus does not, of course, make these principles valid; that has not been argued. But it is necessary for making democracy more than a formal facade.[25]

In schools, as in a democratic society, the students must be made aware of and be in general agreement with the principles upon which the school is being run in order for education to take place. There also must be a feeling of fraternity present in order for students to have the willingness to believe in and partake of the fundamental principles of the institution. Peters asserts in order for any institution to be truly effective that this feeling of fraternity is absolutely necessary and comes about through rituals that celebrate the importance of their commonality.[26] Such rituals might consist of democratic-style student elections which help to emphasize and celebrate the historical significance of the institution and its place in a democracy.

Peters warns that human nature can be the ultimate enemy of democracy and that rationality must prevail in order to keep its fundamental principles in place:

> Democracy is an extremely difficult way of life to sustain. The fundamental moral principles on which it rests---those of fairness, liberty, and the consideration of interests---are principles which are imposed on strong and primitive tendencies. Its emotional underpinning in respect for persons and a feeling of fraternity for others as persons is accessible only to rational men. It requires knowledge about and interest in public affairs on the part of its citizens, and a widespread willingness to work its institutions. It needs, as is often said, constant vigilance to prevent encroachments on the liberties of the individual, as well as institutional safeguards through which such vigilance can find expression...But what more fitting focus could there be for the feeling of fraternity than that of contributing to such a form of life and training others to perpetuate it?[27]

Here Peters is making quite apparent his view of human nature. That it is much more pessimistic than what we find in more progressive or child-centred theories, such as by Rousseau or Dewey, for example, is significant. His view of human nature is the crux of his understanding of education in that we learn here why Peters refuses to view the individual apart from the public realm. One can see by understanding Peters's view of human nature why he believes that undue emphasis on the individual can be to the detriment of civilization. For instance, he views man as inherently self-interested, predisposed to act against the best interests of society if not provided with constraints as well as the opportunity to feel a sense of fraternity with the rest of society.

F. Peters and the Philosophical Tradition

The view of human nature that underpins Peters's philosophy of education is illuminated by his many essays on his precursors in the western tradition of philosophy of education. Although these essays were written at different points in Peters's career, it is appropriate to discuss them here since they bring into sharper focus some assumptions about human nature which are fundamental to Peters's earlier as well as his later writings.

In "Was Plato Nearly Right About Education?", Peters discusses his Platonist leanings, but draws a line between himself and Plato when it comes to the social form in which reason is articulated. Plato's elitism has often been criticized, since he believed that political power should be monopolised by a philosophical elite. Yet, as opposed to Plato, Peters is really pro-democracy and the following statement might serve to quell any accusations of elitism against Peters:

> But I would say that it is democracy, not aristocracy, which is the articulation of reason in its social form. In this revised conception of reason, democracy is the best approximation to the social form in which reason appears. For democracy at very least involves 'parlement' or discussion in the making of public decisions. And procedural principles such as freedom,

> impartiality and respect for persons, which structure the social context in which reason operates, are also principles in the democratic way of life.[28]

Peters's and Plato's philosophies seem to converge predominantly in the area of the importance of reason and forms of knowledge. Yet their ideas on democracy and aristocratic elitism provide the main point of divergence.

In Peters's essay, "John Dewey's Philosophy of Education", Peters reveals that he agrees that there are some good points made by this exponent of the progressive movement in education. However, Peters then goes on to dispute and discount much of Dewey's theory. This essay in particular emphasizes the problems that Peters finds with Dewey's progressive philosophy. Yet, Peters also defends Dewey as being one of the more reasonable voices in the progressive movement and claims that much of what is wrong with the progressive movement has been erroneously attributed to him. He states that Dewey's book, Experience and Education, was an attempt to right this wrong in that it "was highly critical of some of its (the progressive movement's) practices".[29]

Nevertheless, Peters's essay on Dewey contains four major criticisms, mainly about Dewey's lack of insight into the human condition. The pointing out of these flaws in Dewey's ideas, provides us with an even

more complete picture of how Peters himself perceives the human condition.

Peters states that Dewey failed to address the personal aspects of mankind. Ignored are issues of respect for persons in his version of democracy, as well as "interpersonal relationships and the education of the emotions".[30] In fact, Peters thinks that respect for persons is one of the fundamental moral principles. Having respect for persons implies that one honours others in word and in action as agents or determiners of their own destiny and has regard for an individual's feelings and view of the world.[31] Peters believes that this crucial principle is left to happenstance by Dewey, and he is also perturbed by Dewey's neglect of the role that literature plays in education.

Secondly, Peters takes issue with Dewey's one-sided perception of life in that Dewey appears to believe that life is a series of problems that can be solved one way or another. What Dewey ignores here is the idea that some problems cannot be solved and would more properly be viewed as ***predicaments*** that merely exist and must be endured.[32]

Thirdly, and I feel, most importantly, Peters criticizes Dewey's "disregard of the irrational in man".[33] Peters sees this as a significant oversight

as Dewey "completely ignores the fundamental irrationality of man".[34] He further states that:

> He never mentions Freud, who was a contemporary of his, and seems sublimely unaware of the diagnosis of the human condition that derived from his insights. The view that civilisation is a brittle crust containing with difficulty irrational yearnings made no impact on Dewey in spite of his active interest in the rise of nazism as a threat to democracy.[35]

It is obvious that to Peters, herein lies one of the most glaring errors in Dewey's progressivist stance.

A fourth criticism of Dewey involves "defects of the pragmatic stance".[36] What is lacking here says Peters is a necessary sense of wonder and amazement that goes along with education. Peters says that Nature should be viewed with the awe that is inspired by an enjoyment and a reverence for learning, a key ingredient of motivation. The progressive movement effectively removes this key ingredient by insisting on present-centred, communicative experience, with a heavy emphasis on technology. Anything considered irrelevant to the experience if it is not in keeping with the idea of learning for practical purposes, is tossed out the window, so to speak. Thus, Peters sees this as detrimental to the necessary component of intrinsic worth, awe and wonder that is essential to the non-instrumental attitude of the educated person.

Essays on Educators provides clear evidence that Peters wishes to distance himself from child-centred

and progressive philosophies of education. For they significantly lack the insight into the irrationality of human nature that Peters believes to be integral to any philosophy of education or for that matter, any philosophy of mankind in general. Peters's repeated call for a recognition of man's irrational nature in relation to any general theory also discloses his preoccupation with more general and cosmic aspects of the human condition. Once again, a preponderance of evidence draws us to the unavoidable conclusion that Peters is much more than just a brass-tacks philosopher.

Footnotes

[1]Richard S. Peters, Education as Initiation: AnInaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of London Institute of Education, 9 December 1963, (London: Harrap & Co. for University of London Institute of Education, 1964), p. 24.

[2]Ibid., p. 17.

[3]Ibid., pp. 19-26.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., p. 14.

[6]Richard S. Peters, Ethics and Education, (London: George Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd., 1966), pp. 24-25.

[7]Alfred North Whitehead, The Aims of Education and Other Essays, (New York: Mentor Books/The MacMillan Company, 1929), p. 17.

[8]Richard S. Peters, Ethics and Education, (London: George Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd., 1966), p. 31.

[9]Ibid., p. 35.

[10]Ibid., p. 45.

[11]Ibid., p. 47.

[12]Ibid., p. 49.

[13]Ibid., pp. 49, 50.

[14]Richard S. Peters, "Michael Oakeshott's Philosophy of Education" in Politics and Experience, Essays Presented to Michael Oakeshott, Preston King and B.C. Parekh, editors, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 62.

[15]Ibid., p. 63.

[16]Ibid., p. 56.

[17]Richard S. Peters, Ethics and Education, (London: George Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd., 1966), p. 144.

[18]Ibid., p. 145.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid. pp. 114-115.

[22]Ibid., pp. 193, 195.

[23]Ibid., p. 265.

[24]Ibid., p. 291.

[25]Ibid., p. 313.

[26]Ibid., pp. 314-315, 318-319.

[27]Ibid., p. 319.

[28]Richard S. Peters, "Was Plato Nearly Right About Education?" in Essays on Educators, (London: George Allen and Unwin Publishers, 1981), p. 13.

[29]Richard S. Peters, "John Dewey's Philosophy of Education" in Essays on Educators, (London: George Allen and Unwin Publishers, 1981), p. 73.

[30]Ibid., p. 85.

[31]Richard S. Peters, Ethics and Education, (London: George Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd., 1966), p. 210.

[32]Richard S. Peters, "John Dewey's Philosophy of Education" in Essays on Educators, (London: George Allen & Unwin Publishers, 1981), p. 85.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid., pp. 85-86.

[36]Ibid., p. 86.

CHAPTER 3

EDUCATION, THE EDUCATED MAN, AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF EDUCATION

A. Education and the Educated Man

Peters wrote the essays "Education and the Educated Man" and "The Justification of Education" several years after Ethics and Education. In his earlier writings, Peters acknowledged that many will misinterpret and misuse the word "education". But, in "Education and the Educated Man" he revises the definition of "education" so as to acknowledge that many employments of the word that he would once have classified as misuse actually attest to a different concept of education than the one his earlier analysis had addressed:

> I have always assumed this connection between 'education' and the development of an educated man. I have admitted that other people may not have developed this more differentiated type of conceptual structure, but I have insisted that it is important to make these distinctions even if people do not use terms in a specific enough way to mark them out.[1]

In "Education and the Educated Man", Peters decides to accommodate his critics somewhat by distinguishing between two concepts of education. One of these concepts of education comprises those processes of teaching and learning that conduce to the realization of the "educated man". Such processes and

their outcome are determined by the criteria of education as initiation espoused by Peters in his earlier analysis. He emphasizes that the characteristics of an educated man, such as breadth and depth of knowledge, became fixed in linguistic usage during the 19th century. But alongside the specific and historically recent concept of education persisted another more general concept that was not tied to the ideal of the educated man. This more general concept of education may be applied to just about any process of training, upbringing, or socialization. This distinction between education and the educated man was made because Peters, in answer to his critics and through his own personal critique of his earlier work, realized that the many and divergent uses of the word "education" in ordinary language were not all compatible with the concept of education as initiation discussed in his earlier writings.

"Education and the Educated Man" reflects a significant shift in Peters's thinking. Abraham Edel usefully summarizes the significance of this new, more complex analysis in Peters's philosophy. Edel states that:

> By breaking the connection between the processes and the outcome he is able to accommodate the deviant uses of 'education'. It also helps resolve arguments concerning the first definition that had centered on Peters's contention that we could not speak of the 'aims' of education; since

> education was initiation into worthwhile activities, it already had all the aims it needed. Now with the separation of concepts, one could speak of aims with respect to education, but not with respect to the educated man.[2]

It must be emphasized that the crucial issue here is the transition that occurs in Peters's thought. In Peters's original analysis, much familiar talk about education counts as misuse of our language. For example, if people talk about "business education" when they have nothing more ambitious in mind than training for clerical roles, or if a historian talks of "Spartan education," when we all know that this involves almost nothing in the way of depth and breadth of knowledge, then Peters would have claimed that they are using words incorrectly. The transition in Peters's thought occurs where he acknowledges and addresses the implausibility of the above. Linguistic usage of "education" and cognate words that depart from the criteria of education as initiation are so common that it looks as if Peters's earlier analysis is really a projection of his own educational ideals onto ordinary language. This is the formidable objection which Peters had to address. Hence, the new, bifurcated analysis of education acknowledges that there is no linguistic abuse on the part of those who talk of "business education", "Spartan education", and so on, since such language appeals to the older, more general

concept.

In Peters's revised analysis, he still insists that it would be wrong to describe someone who has been trained specifically for a clerical position as an "educated man" and that it would be likewise wrong to describe as an "educated man" a citizen of ancient Sparta who had been trained only for battle. This is so, Peters contends, because we also have a more specific concept of education that applies to teaching and learning conducive to the realization of the educated man. The first account of education as initiation had mistakenly presented this concept as the only concept of education.

In "Education and the Educated Man", Peters also clarifies a link he has made between the practical and instrumental and being educated. He states that:

> Pursuing the practical is not necessarily a disqualification for being educated; for the practical need not be pursued under a purely instrumental aspect.[3]

Peters would like the reader to understand that his idea of worthwhile activities as limited to the non-instrumental variety does have room for the practical.

In P.H. Hirst's essay, "Richard Peters's Contribution to the Philosophy of Education", Hirst investigates his perceptions of how Peters's writings had evolved. "Education and the Educated Man" as Hirst points out:

> ...helped much in elucidating further the important strands in current educational discussion to which he had originally drawn attention. It served too, to introduce directly into the philosophical debate attention to the social context and historical shifts that have radically influenced our educational ideas. But the view that there are basically just two concepts seemed to many not to go far enough in recognising the complexities that any analysis doing justice to the wider social context of education really must take on board.[4]

Hirst's suggested difficulties with the two concepts of education may reflect what many critics had to say about Peters's analysis of the concept of education. However, Hirst acknowledges that many of the criticisms were misguided in that they failed to acknowledge the clarification that Peters provided in "Education and the Educated Man" and that these critics continued to fixate on Peters's earlier writings.

However, Hirst's suggestion that Peters's analysis may not have been thorough enough in addressing the underlying, wider social context of education is an interesting point to ponder. But perhaps Hirst overlooks the fact that in all of Peters's writings there is a conservative vision of education in terms of what human beings essentially are and should strive to become. Looked at from this perspective, Peters's writings become much more than a technical exercise in conceptual analysis. For it can be argued that Peters's specific concept of education (the one he ties to the ideal of the educated man) is not so much a

conceptual discovery as it is a projection of his own distinctive vision of human nature and self-realization. After all, it is not obvious that ordinary language requires us to differentiate the educated and the uneducated precisely according to the criteria Peters's analysis supplies.

But Peters's philosophy was developing in another direction as well. In addition to a new, more complex analysis of education, Peters was also constructing a new and more elaborate version of his justification of education.

B. The Justification of Education

Peters's essay, "The Justification of Education", seeks to clarify the desirability of the specific concept of the educated man as is found in "Education and the Educated Man". That is, he offers a justification of a subject-oriented, liberal education for non-instrumental and instrumental purposes by the melding of cognitive pursuits along with a non-instrumental attitude. The benefits that result from such subject-oriented learning, can be both social and individual in nature.

Peters initially states that his purpose is to sort out the values specific to being educated and the justification for these specific values. He states:

> It is to these limited questions that I propose to address myself in this article rather than to wider questions of value with which I was concerned in Ethics and Education, and with which, in places, I confused these limited questions--- owing perhaps to certain inadequacies in the analysis of the concept of 'education' with which I was then working.[5]

As previously discussed, Peters discounts the more general concept of education deeming it "not of any significance for its valuative suggestions" in favour of the more specific concept of education referred to in his earliers writings and characterizing his concept of the educated man.[6]

He then goes on to develop an instrumental argument for the different criteria of "education", although as we shall subsequently see, Peters thinks this argument is severely limited. He surmises that an instrumental argument could be made for knowledge and understanding in that there is obvious benefit to the survival of a community through development of skills and the ability to support oneself by such acquired knowledge. Also, the passing on of such knowledge and understanding is necessary to the survival of a community through communication. Communication of knowledge and understanding provides a certain amount of control and utility in maintaining and developing a civilized society. Understanding of acquired knowledge also allows for the flexibility needed to adapt to new situations and the need for new information which an

industrialized society inevitably brings.

Another focus for instrumental arguments is breadth of understanding which, as Peters states, contributes to the overall ability of a community or society to increase its consumption. For example, breadth of understanding can develop citizens who are able to apply their vast array of knowledge to become more efficient employees, better communicators and to help "make their institutions more humane and civilized".[7]

The instrumental argument can also be applied to the criteria of the non-instrumental attitude. To reiterate, the non-instrumental attitude has to do with the nature of one's affective engagement with activities: "The key to it is that regard, respect, or love should be shown for the intrinsic features of activities".[8] The instrumental argument for this attitude is that people who possess it in their work might be more productive. From this perspective, non-instrumental attitudes really contribute to the betterment of society, but it does not follow that the individual is left out altogether. Peters also points out the same argument can be seen to benefit individuals as well:

> For it merely has to be pointed out that if certain types of knowledge and skill are socially beneficial, then it will be in the individual's interest to acquire some of them; for he has to

> earn a living and he will be likely to get prestige and reward for his possession of skills and knowledge that are socially demanded...So the same kind of limited instrumental case can be made for education when it is looked at externally from the individual's point of view as when it is looked at from the point of view of social benefit.[9]

However, Peters finds such instrumental arguments incomplete for the following reasons. Production, profit, and consumption as goals in themselves are inadequate for full justification as these cannot be looked upon as possessing intrinsic values constitutive of a wholly worthwhile quality of life. For example, with regard to the non-instrumental attitude and the instrumental argument for justification of it, Peters states that:

> It is assessed from the outside purely in terms of its actual results, not at all in terms of how it is conceived by its participants. This, of course, is not an entirely irrelevant or immoral way of looking at a practice. But if it predominates a widespread and insidious type of corruption ensues. For the point of view of participants in a practice becomes of decreasing importance. They are regarded basically as vehicles for the promotion of public benefit...This is the manipulator's attitude to other human beings, the "hidden hand" in operation from the outside.[10]

It seems that in the final analysis, Peters finds the instrumental arguments for justification lacking the aspect of rational value in a larger sense. The argument takes for granted greater consumption and control as the ends which reason must subserve, but this is repugnant to Peters's deepest philosophical

assumptions. His underlying philosophy of human nature stresses the centrality of reason to human life not as a mere tool for the satisfaction of our desires, but as **the essence of our being**. From this perspective, no justification of education in strictly instrumental terms could be successful as it is too narrow, and therefore, incomplete. Thus, he turns to non-instrumental arguments for justification of education in an attempt to find a higher level of rational justification of the values encompassed by the educated man.

The non-instrumental argument can be understood when we attempt to grasp his idea of the relationship between his criteria of education and his concept of justification. It then becomes clear that Peters's argument is that one should become educated for the sake of education itself.

Peters argues that justification for education is necessarily tied to the human condition. This really is the crux of the argument in that Peters describes human life as being intelligible only through mentalistic concepts, such as belief, intention and the like. His point here is that the mentalistic concepts in terms of which the distinctiveness of human life is established; concepts like choosing rather than merely desiring, for example, are all conceptually connected

to notions of truth and justification. Thus, as humans with a capacity for rationality, if we are seeking justification for education, this means we are already committed to the pursuit of truth and understanding. As has been stated earlier, justification of education for non-instrumental reasons arises out of the question, "why do this rather than that"? Peters says that anyone who would ask this question must already have committed himself or herself to a serious level of inquiry and pursuit of truth, and thus, he or she already has the non-instrumental attitude necessary for justification. To therefore **ask** for justification, is justification in itself.

Some might say that this is an ad hominem argument. The difference between this argument for the justification of education and Peters's previous attempts is that Peters is more effective in explaining that this is not so. By showing how the demand for justification is woven into the mentalistic concepts under which human life becomes intelligible, Peters tries to establish that the justification is applicable to human life in general and not just to the lives of reflective people who ask "why do this rather than that?". The demand for justification is an inescapable constraint on human life, and hence, so too is the ideal of the educated man implicit in those

constraints.

Peters's argument greatly emphasizes the need for pursuing a great **breadth** of knowledge as well as forms of knowledge that allow one to understand the **why** of things as opposed to the **how**. Peters's argument for **breadth** of knowledge is encapsulated in the following statement:

> It would be unreasonable, therefore, to deprive anyone of access in an arbitrary way to forms of understanding which might throw light on alternatives open to him.[11]

By studying forms of knowledge that show us the **why** of things, we can apply this way of thinking and what has been learned to other areas in our lives. To emphasize this, Peters states:

> For to be educated is to have one's view of the world transformed by the development and systematization of conceptual schemes. It is to be disposed to ask the reason why of things...There are forms of understanding such as science, philosophy, literature, and history which have a far-ranging cognitive content. This is one feature which distinguishes them from "knowing how" and the sort of knowledge that people have who are adept at games and at practical skills. There is a limited amount to know about riding bicycles, swimming, or golf. Furthermore, what is known sheds little light on much else.[12]

Also, we witness here as before, Peters's great emphasis on the need for cognitive perspective; for a connection to be made between the worthwhile activity and other aspects of one's life. A connection which seems to be possible, in large part, through the development of a non-instrumental attitude towards

education; the pursuit of truth, knowledge, and understanding for its own sake.

Peters's arguments in both "Education and the Educated Man" and "The Justification of Education" are not merely reformulations of earlier arguments, but are attempts to clarify and defend criticisms as well as to refine his philosophy. Again, I turn to Hirst's essay on Peters. Here, Hirst points out the strengths and weaknesses in Peters's works. The most predominant among his criticisms is the transcendent nature of Peters's argument. Hirst suggests that this type of argument is sometimes difficult to discern or pin down with any degree of certainty especially since it relies on an "a priori" philosophical position that uses presuppositions to justify its argument.[13] Hirst explains that Peters has used "Kant-like" transcendental arguments in a way that some critics will not readily accept:

> His conviction that any adequate philosophical work must seek to get at the most fundamental elements of our thinking and seek for some ultimate justification for these led him to explore the use of this type of argument for the justification of a range of fundamental moral principles...and the justification of the value of a distinctive range of human activities...as part of 'the good life'. By using such arguments it seems only too clear that Peters is claiming a universal, ultimate necessity for certain values irrespective of all social contexts and the demonstration of this simply by asserting certain conceptual relations to be the case in all coherent thought. Arguments of this type have long been the subject of controversy and their

limitations have to be carefully watched.[14] Hirst surmises that Peters's transcendental argument might serve only to articulate "the boundaries of the categories of experience and thought", but cannot effectively go beyond experience and thought or rise above various social contexts into a universal framework.[15] Similarly, in Peters's "The Justification of Education", the elements of justification are difficult to prove or disprove because of the elusive quality of the transcendental argument and its poor ability to articulate specific presuppositions. However, it appears that Hirst does not completely discount the transcendental argument because he acknowledges that there may be a minimal area of the argument that can be seen to be transcendentally justified with more certainty and that is in the pursuit of human knowledge and understanding.[16] Hirst deems that the value of such criteria can be more easily presupposed and therefore, justified. Earlier, Hirst qualifies his remarks by stating that it may be the case that there really are no valid transcendental arguments.[17] He does not seem to commit himself either way. Nevertheless, he does try to reveal the positive aspects of Peters's works:

> At best the argument would seem to justify theoretical pursuits in so far as they are concerned with the pursuit of reasons for doing things. Only in these terms is the pursuit of

> reasons for doing things intelligible. This can be interpreted as justifying particular rational pursuits because they constitute ways of asking and answering questions of distinctive kinds which have their own internal criteria and are thus valuable in themselves...Surely the real value of these pursuits properly conducted must lie in their much wider significance in humanlife...It is, therefore, certainly more appropriate to see his argument as justifying these pursuits in some way as fundamental to the determination of the rational life and therefore central to education.[18]

Peters's justification of education seems to be based largely on a non-instrumental form of justification for the pursuit of knowledge and understanding within a framework for the justification of the rational, good life. Encompassing his argument from all sides is his unshaken belief in the idea that although reason does not come easily to human beings, man's capacity for rational thinking is the key to the good life. Whether Peters's transcendent argument is effective minimally or not at all is greatly overshadowed by his unrelenting insistence on the overriding virtues of reason.

Footnotes

[1]Richard S. Peters, "Education and the Educated Man" in A Critique of Current Educational Aims: Part I of Education and the Development of Reason, edited by R.S. Peters, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 8.

[2]Abraham Edel, "Analytic Philosophy of Education at the Crossroads" in Educational Judgments, Papers in the Philosophy of Education, edited by James F. Doyle, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1973), p. 247.

[3]Richard S. Peters, "Education and the Educated Man" in A Critique of Current Educational Aims: Part I of Education and the Development of Reason, edited by R.S. Peters, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 9-10.

[4]P.H. Hirst, "Richard Peters's Contribution to the Philosophy of Education" in Education, Values and Mind, edited by David E. Cooper, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 22.

[5]Richard S. Peters, "The Justification of Education" in The Philosophy of Education, edited by R.S. Peters, (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 239.

[6]Ibid., p. 240.

[7]Ibid., p. 245.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid., p. 246.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid., p. 256.

[12]Ibid., pp. 256, 257.

[13]P.H. Hirst, "Richard Peters's Contribution to the Philosophy of Education" in Education, Values and Mind, edited by David E. Cooper, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p 14.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., p. 15.

[16]Ibid., p. 25.

[17]Ibid., p. 15.

[18]Ibid., p. 23.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION: DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND EDUCATIONAL AIMS

In Peters's last major essay on the meaning and justification of education, "Democratic Values and Educational Aims", he reiterates his stance on democracy and education by once again pointing out that there are ambiguities in the concepts, "democracy" and "education". He states that some might call "education" a "contestable" concept, where "different groups compete endlessly for their particular interpretations".[1] Peters asserts that in order for a concept to be contestable, however, it must already be linked to a "persuasive definition", whereby:

> ...Selected conditions are linked with a recommending type of word and by this indirect method certain policies or ways of life are given the stamp of approval. There is much to be said for this contention; for the term *education* is used valuatively, but vaguely with lack of precision regarding its area of application. From this it might be mistakenly suggested that all that needs to be done is to pick out certain criteria that seem central to one's understanding of education and lay these down as a stipulatory preliminary to the issues to be discussed. This, I think would be a pretty pointless and presumptuous procedure. To start with, the concept of education may be contestable, but it is not completely so. We cannot call anything we like education, for example, scratching our heads. At least it denotes some kind of learning, and not any sort of learning either.[2]

In this essay, Peters reveals that the concept of education is more indeterminate than he had previously

thought. He is insistent that the concept of education is in large part not contestable, but he concedes that there are contestable elements within the concept. These contestable aspects of the concept of education have to do with rival educational **aims**. That is, there exist differing possible priorities among the many outcomes of learning that education may embody, even when education is seen in its narrowest sense.

In the earlier portions of the essay, Peters repeats many of his earlier arguments, reiterating much of what was said in "Education and the Educated Man", for instance. He again stresses the importance of reason in education and the forms of knowledge that will help develop reason. That the development of an individual's reason cannot be separated from the public domain in which he exists is made clear throughout this essay. Indeed, at the end of the essay he emphasizes his affinity with Plato:

> ...I have followed Plato's contention that there is a fit between a type of state and a type of man. My account, however of both the democratic state and the democratic man differs radically from Plato's. There is, of course, a general similarity in that, on both accounts, the development of reason occupies a central place in education. But whereas for Plato this is represented as a process by means of which a few arrive at an authoritative vision of the Good, both an agreed end-point and the existence of such an elite are denied by the democrat.[3]

Again, Peters likes to point out his fondness for Plato, but also reasserts his disdain for Plato's

elitism. Peters's and Plato's philosophies seem to converge predominantly in the area of the importance of reason and forms of knowledge. Their comparative ideas on democracy and aristocratic elitism provide the main point of divergence, while their ideas about the link between education and the development of reason mark important common ground. Peters and Plato both have similar aims of education in mind, but very different ideas on the concept of democracy. Thus, we see, using Peters and Plato as an example, how the aims based on democratic values can be contestable and why democracy, itself is a contestable concept.

Peters's previous argument for transcendental justification of education is conspicuously absent and this may be because of Peters's difficulties in explaining the argument to his critics without it sounding weak. Here, it is dropped completely without mention. Now he refers to education through the idea of aims and does not see it as a unitary concept anymore.

Nevertheless, Peters continues to endorse the bifurcated analysis of education as was elucidated in "Education and the Educated Man", however, he now maintains that that analysis cannot iron out many controversies regarding education which he previously thought were possible to resolve. An example of this

might be, for instance, that the priority given to the pursuit of knowledge in the ideal of the educated man could be contested by those who would apply greater significance to other processes of learning in their educational aims. Greater significance, for example, might be applied to aesthetic or religious values by some. Peters, himself downplays the significance of aesthetic and religious aims in this essay and explains that he does not feel such aims are significant because they "are not particularly distinctive of the democratic way of life".[4] However, he now seems to concede that even in its narrowest sense, "education" cannot preclude arguments of those who would favour priority for such aims. To that extent, he conceives education as a partially contestable rather than a unitary and determinate concept.

In essence, Peters main argument is that before one can establish educational aims, one must establish the societal values that one holds dear. After reiterating many of the ideas that were discussed in previous essays, Peters goes on to defend his own view of the educational aims that he believes would befit human beings under the conditions of democratic public life. The conditions of democratic life that he feels are compulsory are associated with values like respect for others (interpersonal morality), knowledge and

understanding of the human condition, truth, reason, and general agreement with the democratic way of life. This includes principles such as impartiality, concern for others, and tolerance, along with a consensus regarding some minimal rules of conduct or law "without which a democratic society could not continue".[5] Peters acknowledges that his view of democratic values may be contestable, but his view of educational aims is not because:

> Democracy is concerned more with principles for proceeding than with a determinate destination and aims of education in a democracy should emphasize the qualities of mind essential for such a shared journey.[6]

This last statement of the essay encapsulates the direction in which Peters wishes the reader to travel with him in order to understand his argument. Here we see a shift from Peters's previous essays since he drops his prior emphasis on conceptual analysis and, as I mentioned, the transcendental argument for justification of education. He shifts into a more obvious commentary on the connection he makes between what he thinks should predominate among educational aims, i.e. the development of reason, and his own philosophy of man and what might be considered the good society. In this essay, "Democratic Values and Educational Aims", more explicitly than ever, Peters presents his ideal as a contestable interpretation of

the aims of education grounded in a particular vision of the human condition and the good society. Are these the words of a mere "brass-tacks" philosopher? Although, Peters still insinuates to the end that he is simply just that, his increasing concern throughout his essays with the human condition and the good society would appear to subvert such an idea.

Peters's final essay before he fell ill is entitled simply, "Philosophy of Education".[7] Although it may not be as important to Peters's legacy of essays as its predecessor, "Democratic Values and Educational Aims" it still unwittingly provides us with the picture of a philosopher of education who is more concerned with the overall state of the human condition and of society than he himself admits.

While reading this essay one gets the idea that Peters knows it will be his last. He points out and elucidates the past and present states of the philosophy of education, fleshing out the areas that he feels could have been dealt with more and/or improved upon. He then suggests a direction for future study although it does not appear from his writing that he wishes to continue the struggle. This essay might be looked upon as Peters's passing on of the torch, so to speak.

What is important about the essay, speaks volumes

about the man. One can see how he has struggled to accommodate his critics while upholding his ideals, admitting where his arguments might have been weak (he does mention the transcendental argument here) and subsequently refers the reader to his last important essay, "Democratic Values and Educational Aims" to try to clarify his position:

> Unfortunately, this basic thesis, which I still think defensible, was flawed by two major mistakes. Firstly, a too specific concept of 'education' was used which concentrated on its connection and understanding. Secondly, I tried but failed to give a convincing transcendental justification of 'worthwhile activities', such as science or agriculture as distinct from bingo or playing fruit machines, which I thought relevant to the curriculum. (Actually, my later books...contained some better work...But...it was Ethics and Education that attracted the academic flak). I have now come to see that I was trying to extract too much from the concept of education, which is more indeterminate than I used to think. The end or ends towards which processes of learning are seen as developing, eg. the development of reason which we stressed so much are aims of education, not part of the concept of 'education' itself and will depend on acceptance or rejection of the values of the society in which it takes place. I have recently written a paper trying to work this out in the case of democratic societies, where the development of reason has its natural home.[8]

In my opinion, Peters's vision of the good society dominates his ideas and therefore, supersedes any attempts he might make towards brass-tacks issues of conceptual analysis. Perhaps this is why his transcendental argument continued to fail to convince his critics and may be why he consciously (or not)

dropped it from "Democratic Values and Educational Aims".

In "Philosophy of Education", he speaks of the need for more "philosophical depth", urging philosophers of education to write more books and fewer articles.[9] He states that, "above all, philosophy of education is in need of a more explicit theory of human nature" and that he "...would like to see...more stress on social values and human nature".[10]

These final essays are simply more evidence that prove Peters to be concerned with the Good and the direction of mankind, certainly more than just the brass-tacks educational philosopher that he made himself out to be.

Footnotes

[1]Richard S. Peters, "Democratic Values and Educational Aims" in Essays on Educators, (London: George Allen & Unwin Publishers, 1981), p. 32.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 49.

[4]Ibid., p. 41.

[5]Ibid., p. 38.

[6]Ibid., p. 49.

[7]Richard S. Peters, "Philosophy of Education" in Educational Theory and its Foundation Disciplines, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 30-61.

[8]Ibid., p. 37.

[9]Ibid., p. 50.

[10]Ibid., pp. 51, 55.

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